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ABSTRACT

The types of positions for which black administrators were hired in predominantly white colleges and universities in the late 1960s and the 1970s and the problems they encountered are considered. It is suggested that the threat of more riots by the black community and the federal government's threat to withhold funds from institutions with an insufficient number of black personnel resulted in the appointment of more blacks to administrative positions at various levels in predominantly white institutions. It is claimed that blacks were either hired to manage programs directed to blacks or they were hired to staff positions with impressive titles functioning, at least theoretically, in direct support to top level white line officers in the institution. It is argued that the nature of the jobs offered to blacks increased the possibility of failure and that failure was in part directly attributable to the reasons for which they were hired. Additionally, black administrators were given the responsibility but not the power and authority in the formal administrative structure commensurate with that responsibility. On the other hand, the programs they administered were poorly supported and outside the mainstream of the campus community. The programs that emerged during the 1960s were academic programs (black studies and ethnic studies); easy access programs (open admission programs); and academic support programs (special tutorial and remedial in nature). The programs tended to be supported on temporary funds, the creditability of the coursework was challenged by white faculty, and their faculty members were not tenured. (SW)

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THE STATUS OF BLACK ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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The ascention of a representative number of Blacks to administrative positions in predominantly white colleges and universities resulted from the racial conflicts of the last decade. This conclusion is partially substantiated by the paucity of research on the subject prior to 1970.

Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the subsequent riots in April of 1968, educational institutions were faced with the necessity of hiring more Blacks to serve in various capacities. This need resulted from pressures exerted by the Black community (primarily through the potential threat of more violence) and by the Federal government through its threat to withhold funds from institutions with an insufficient number of Black personnel. Subsequently, more Blacks were appointed to administrative positions at various levels in predominantly white colleges and universities.

In reviewing what has happened to Black administrators appointed during this time, however, it is crystal clear that most of these appointments were made simply to appease the Black community and to maintain the flow of Federal dollars into the institutions concerned.

The positions for which Black administrators were hired may be grouped into two categories.

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They were either hired to manage programs oriented toward addressing the expressed needs or desires of Black students and the Black community or they were hired in staff positions with impressive titles functioning, at least theoretically, in direct support to top level white line officers in the institution. In either instance these administrators experienced numerous problems and were highly frustrated in their efforts to perform their duties in a creditable fashion. In fact, the very nature of their jobs increased the possibility of failure. These problems were directly attributable to the reasons for which they were hired and were manifested by the lack of control these administrators had over significant operational aspects of their particular institutions or the insignificance and tenuousness of the programs they managed. In one instance, Black administrators had been given the responsibility but not the power and authority in the formal administrative structure commensurate with that responsibility. In the other, the programs they administered were poorly supported and outside the main stream of the campus community.

Program Administrators

The programs which emerged during the 60's were: (1) academic programs (Black Studies and Ethnic Studies, etc.); (2) easy access programs (open admission programs); and (3) academic support programs (special tutorial and remedial in nature).

Academic programs were designed to provide Black students with a disciplined, scholarly study of the Black Experience.[1] In most instances, the program began with an analysis of the history and culture of Black people and culminated with an exploration of the various issues and influences shaping the lives of Blacks in contemporary society. Rarely were these academic thrusts established as

full fledged departments comparable to other departments in the university. In most instances, they were relegated to program status and established outside the framework of the regular academic departments of the institution involved.[2] Regardless of the status of the program, however, the characteristics which tended to be common to them all were:

(1) They were supported on temporary funds;

(2) The creditability of their course work was challenged by white faculty who maintained the right of approval or disapproval of courses;

(3) Their faculty members were not tenured track professors; and

(4) Students were discouraged by white faculty and administrators from taking their courses.[3]

The administrators of these programs found themselves managing programs funded on short term monies; therefore, much of their energies were devoted to seeking additional funds to help the programs survive. Because they nor their faculty could acquire tenure, continued employment with the institution was always questionable. In effect, insufficient funds coupled with lack of authentic control over their programs, students and destiny in the institution meant that, by and large, the programs were destined for failure.

With open admission, special tutorial and remedial programs, the pattern of frustration for Black administrators managing these programs was similar. Programs fitting into these areas can perhaps best be grouped into three categories: (1) combination programs including all three components: (2) remedial programs: and (3) open administration -- special tutorial.

Combination, Remedial Programs

Combination programs usually consisted of an admission recruitment component, a special tutorial component and a remediation component. In most instances, these programs were supported on external funds with the most common source of financing being the federal government.[4] Under most circumstances, the guidelines governing the allocation of funds in support of the programs required the receiving institution to provide varying degrees of matching funds. The interpretation of the matching fund concept was such that imaginative proposal writers and program implementors figured out various ingeneous ways in which the receiving institutions could provide in-kind contribution instead of actual dollars to fulfill the matching fund requirement. Not only did universities escape the necessity of investing hard dollars in support of these programs but they also affixed huge percentages of indirect costs which generated additional sums of money for the institution.[5] In most instances, the indirect costs did not contribute directly to the support of the program. Because steps were not taken to absorb the programs once outside funding was no longer available, most of these programs folded when the funding agencies changed priorities and no longer provided support funds for them.

Remedial Programs were characterized by many of the same ills as those experienced by combination programs. These efforts, however, were generally localized to a specific college within the university; therefore, survival was much more tenuous.

Open Admission -- Special Tutorial Programs

These two programs are grouped together because they tended to be appendices of other functional units in the university which had

institutional-wide tutorial and admission responsibilities. In these instances, the persons hired were basically administrators over the functions of these units as they related to services provided for Black students. That is to say, the Black admission officer was usually hired to concentrate upon the recruitment of Black youngsters. He/she was responsible for managing those activities of the admission process which related directly to the schools with which he/she worked. These schools were usually predominantly Black; therefore, the students with which he/she worked were usually Black.[6]

A similar situation existed with tutorial programs. Usually, these services were linked to some aspects of the Students Affairs Program of the university. A minority person was hired to coordinate tutorial services for Black students. Often, the person was asked to act as a counselor and was called upon to handle the "militant advisee".[7]

In each of these circumstances, Black administrators found themselves in situations in which they were expected to be effective managers. Not only were they confronted with the yearly anxiety over whether or not funds would be available to support the functions and maintain their jobs, but they were also faced with the necessity of justifying the existance of their programs to hostile white faculty members and administrators.

The hostility existed for a number of reasons. Some flowed from the belief that the academy should not serve students who were "not prepared" for college level work, while others felt these programs were receiving resources which otherwise might come to them. The basic reason Black administrators of these programs received such resistance, however, appears to have been institutional racism.

Thomas Sowell, an economics professor at UCLA, writing from his personal experiences at white colleges, presents a penetrating account of the conflicts and pressures between Black administrators and the so-called white campus liberals.[8]

Dr. Sowell points out that in the mid-60's the token Black representation on the white campus was a fashionable thing and an indicator of the liberal institution.[9] While the white liberal faculty and administrators would be glad to have their token Black as the nominal head of the several short lived programs designed to appease Black students' demands and to maximize their student body counts, they would frustrate all his/her efforts at exercising real power. There were often several overt and covert mechanisms used to achieve these ends.

Overtly, the white campus community often were the instigators turning the militant Black students against the Black administrators by depicting the administrator as being against the well-being of Black students.[10] Since the Black administrator was one of a very limited number of cohorts on campus, it was extremely hard to counteract these charges.

Covertly, white faculty and administrators would align themselves together forming coalitions to ensure that the programs failed, thus, proving the incompetency of the Black administrator. When the white institutions were eager for the money from the external funding agency, however, failure of the programs was not the ultimate objective. The primary objective was to prove the incompetence of the Black professionals. In those instances in which the Black administrator chose or was forced to leave his/her position, in almost all cases, he/she was replaced by a white who was invariably to

succeed.[11]

In his study of black administrators in public community colleges, Kimmons concluded that the Black administrator was more involved in routine, procedural, and human relations type functions mainly with Black students and the Black community than were their white counterparts. The real implications of his findings were that the Black program administrator was left out of line functions, and the decisions they were allowed to make did not call for creativity and autonomy.[12]

Kimmon's work also pointed out that Black administrators of short-lived programs experienced a higher self-perception of role conflict than their white associates.[13] Given the conflicting forces with which they were confronted, the alienation and isolation experienced, the uncertainty of continued employment with the institution, their inability to minimize the effects of the problems their students were experiencing and the general lack of support being received for all of their efforts, their tendency toward experiencing varying degrees of role conflict was readily understandable.

In addressing the problems of Black program administrators in predominantly white campuses, Moore and Wagstaff pointed out that administrators felt more isolated than faculty members. Administrators found themselves in situations in which their roles were ill-defined and their positions lacked authority and they made few, if any, real decisions. The many negative experiences forced them to suspect the reasons for their recruitment and ultimate employment. Additionally, over eighty percent of those queried perceived their major responsibility as one of keeping the Black student in line and pacifying the Black community.[14]

Black Administrators in Staff Positions

In most institutions, administrators are categorized on the basis of their role and position in the administrative structure of the organization. Accordingly, administrators may be either line or staff officers. Generally speaking, line officers are managers with administrative authority and direct responsibility for personnel, budget, and programs related to major goal activities. They are a part of the administrative hierarchy of the organization.[15] Being part of this hierarchy is extremely significant because it means that power and authority in the organization are clearly defined. Persons of lower rank are subject to the decisions of line officers and both are keenly aware of the dimensions of their relationship.

On the other hand, staff officers occupy positions outside the administrative hierarchy of the institution.[16] That is to say, they are a part of the institution but their power and authority as administrators are based on the knowledge they possess about given issues and their ability to influence line officers to see the value of their recommendations. In most instances, staff officers are subordinate to the line officers; in others, they are neither subordinate nor superior in rank to line officers but function in consultant roles to them.[17] Black administrators are usually hired as staff, rather than line officers.

The differences in influence between line and staff officers in institutional settings are extremely significant when it is understood that line officers gain their authority from position in the organization, whereas staff officers gain their authority from their particular knowledge. The effectness of Black administrators in staff positions, then, is contingent upon the degree to which they are capable of using their knowledge to influence the line officer

to use their ideas and recommendations in the resolution of given problems. Success, then, is related to influence gained because one is knowledgeable about issues, rather than to the power inherent in a particular position in the institution.

Under ideal circumstances, one could conclude that individuals who are influential because of their knowledge are more capable of providing leadership in administrative roles than individuals who must depend upon their position to influence others. It must be remembered, however, that knowledge is largely an individual property. It cannot be transferred from one person to another by decree. In like manner, the application of knowledge is also an individual act. That being the case, those persons to be influenced must be willing to accept the knowledge offered and desirous of applying it in the resolution of given problems. Because Black administrators were hired to pacify the Black community and/or to demonstrate that the hiring institution is an "equal opportunity employer"--neither of which is legitimate--the leadership which they could provide based on their knowledge of given issues is neither accepted nor respected by those who must be influenced. Hence, the superior knowledge of the Black administrator goes unrecognized, unutilized and unrewarded by the institution.

Moore and Wagstaff point out that the majority of Black administrators fall into the "Assistant to" category.[18] The differences between an Assistant, Associate or Vice Staff position and that of an "Assistant to" staff position are significant. The Assistant, Associate or Vice Staff position usually contains clearly defined work elements with vestiges of assumed or prescribed authority for selected aspects of the operation. From time to time, persons functioning in these

positions may be given special assignments to complete; however, by and large, their jobs are clearly defined. They are hired to perform specific responsibilities and usually, their jobs are not created during the time of crisis.

The "Assistant to" staff position does not contain clearly defined work elements. Persons in these positions have absolutely no authority. They serve solely at the pleasure of the line officer to whom they are accountable. Usually, the funds for their positions come from the discretionary monies of the line officer for whom they work. The position was created during a time of crisis and is subject to elimination during each budget review period. A substantial portion of the "Assistant to" Black administrator's time is devoted to resolving Black related problems for the line officer and intervening into potentially volatile race-related situations which the line officers feel uncomfortable handling. In many instances, the Black "Assistant to" is asked to write speeches and make program suggestions which the line officer can use in his interaction with the Black community. The role is one in which the Black administrator is subject to be blamed when his efforts or counsel does not resolve a problem but will rarely, if ever, receive credit for the accomplishments experienced by the line officer who implements recommendations coming from the Black "Assistant to."

Regardless of the specific title of the position, when Black administrators occupy staff positions they face other critical factors which tend to neutralize their effectiveness.

Two facts of organizational life are: (1) the ultimate justification for an administrative act is that it is in line with the institution's rules and regulations, and (2) the administra-

tive act has been approved directly or by implications by one of superior rank.[19] Because the Black administrator occupies a staff position outside of the administrative hierarchy, his recommendations may always be challenged by the line officers and other personnel who question the degree to which such recommendations are consistent with the rules and regulations of the organization or with the expectations of those who are in superior ranks. Such questioning may be legitimate, but in most instances, it represents the resistance of white personnel in the institution to accepting recommendations offered by a Black person--regardless of his credentials, qualifications or demonstrated capabilities as an administrator.

By virtue of his peculiar position in the institution, then, the Black administrator faces an interesting dilemma. He is expected by both selected line officers in superior ranks, as well as by that segment of the Black community which might be most affected by the activities of the institution, to influence decision making; and yet his staff position outside the administrative structure means that he has no real power to do what is expected of him. People in the institution are not obligated to accept his recommendations. He is paraded by the institution when it is expedient to do so, and ignored when critical decisions are to be made. His credibility is questioned in the Black community because the expectations that the community has of seeing evidence that he has in fact influenced the decision-making and direction of the institution is not forthcoming.

The Black administrator in that situation may choose one of three alternative courses of action. First, he may choose to function on an extremly low profile, in which case he will provide line officers with information in such a way that he is not perceived by them as a threat. One of the consequences of pursuing this course is that

no one really knows what the Black administrator is doing because the line officers using his recommendations ultimately receive credit for them.

Second, he may choose to express his discomfort with his powerless, token role. If he voices these concerns to line officers, however, he is usually accused, in a very condescending fashion, of not knowing the ropes of organizational life and ultimately labeled incompetent. If he voices these concerns to persons outside the institution, he is again accused of ignorance about the functioning of the institution. In this instance, an additional penalty is his systematic exclusion from critical decision-making activities and ultimate isolation from the institution altogether.

Third, he may decide to deal directly with his superiors, outlining the insignificance of his position and requesting total responsibility for given areas. Pursuing this alternative may lead to one of two adjustments on the part of the institution. On the one hand, the institution may assign total responsibility for limited areas to the Black administrator while leaving him in his staff position. The drawback with this arrangement is that lower line officers may find themselves subordinate to two authorities--the Black administrator and the line administrator to whom the former is responsible. As a result, conflicting orders may be issued to persons in lower ranks, giving them the opportunity to magnify the differences between the orders received from the Black administrator and those received from his superiors. The second possible adjustment which the institution may make is to place the Black administrator in a line position, thereby giving him power in the administrative hierarchy of the system. This adjustment would be most desirable if the Black administrator is appointed to a line position traditionally

maintained by the institution and not one created especially for him.

It is obvious that most of the courses of action the Black administrator may take to remedy his situation are rather limited and have potential for creating circumstances that give the impression he is incapable of performing his tasks effectively. The alternative which holds the greatest promise is that which would result in his being appointed to a traditional line position giving him legitimate authority and sufficient power to implement decisions once made. This step will only be taken, however, when institutions hire Black administrators because of their competence and not to pad affirmative action reports or to pacify the Black community.

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